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ABSTRACT

An overview of the development of formal education in the Arab countries over the past 12 centuries is presented. The overview, arranged into five major sections, emphasizes the interplay of indigenous and foreign cultural influences. Brief sections on the Great Arab Age (7th-10th centuries) and the decline of Arab culture (11th-17th centuries) precedes substantive sections on Arab education in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. The section covering the 18th century examines the stagnating influence of the Ottoman Empire on Arab education and cultural progress. The section on the 19th and 20th centuries focuses on the impact of the West on Arab education. The establishment of a separate school system on the Western model and the college and university system are described. Subsections consider modern education in Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Gulf states. A bibliography is included. (LP)

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A Cultural History of Education in the Arab World with special reference to the Arabian Gulf Region

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The educational systems that now exist in the Arab countries especially in the Arabian Gulf Region are, by and large, a product of a long historical process, with a diversity of cultural factors, part of which can be traced back to the early centuries of Islam and the Arabization of the whole area. However, most of these factors are related to the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

THE GREAT ARAB AGE (7th - 10th CENTURIES A.D.)

Islam which originally appeared in the Arab Peninsula (in the seventh century A.D.) and soon spread over West Asia and North Africa, was not only a system of society, state, law, art and thought - a new way of life with religion as its unifying factor.

As a new way of life for both the Arabs of the Peninsula and the peoples of the neighbouring countries, Islam developed its educational institutions that mainly included the Kuttabs (elementary schools for teaching the Koran and Arabic language), and the mosques (post-elementary schools and adult-educational centres). These were the most important means for the perpetuation and regeneration of Arab culture.

Realizing that the cultural superiority of the peoples outside the Peninsula was largely due to their technical and scientific equipment, the early Arabs - in their attempt to build a new strong culture - adopted incredible measures in that field. Between the eighth and tenth centuries, the best aspects of Greek and Oriental knowledge were made available in the Arabic language. Some first class original work in chemistry, physics, medicine, astronomy and mathematics was also made by the Arabs. They further developed the experimental method in science. The scientific works written in Arabic during the Middle Ages remained for centuries "the main vehicles of the living science." [1]

The role played by educational institutions in accelerating the Arab scientific movement in the early Middle Ages was apparent. Specialized agencies were installed in the Arab World for the provision of the

new cultural developments. The Abbasid Caliph al-Mamun (813-833 A.D.), for example, established a scientific academy (Beit-ul-Hikmah) in Baghdad (IRAQ). One scholar noted that "sciences other than medicine were mostly taught in mosques", and the "every important mosque had ... its library not only of theological works, but also of philosophical and scientific works."[2]

The extraordinary achievements of the Arabs in science in the Middle Ages did not, however, have a remarkable impact upon life. On the one hand, a good deal of Arabic science had a platonic character due to the nature of the age and of the assimilated knowledge. On the other hand the common man did not concern himself with scientific achievement. In different walks of life, he mastered his work without any need whatsoever to be introduced to science or go through a previous preparation in a school. The "on the job" training or learning by direct experience in the field was the sole road to becoming a trader, a peasant, an artisan and, further, an artist.[3]

THE DECLINE OF ARAB CULTURE

The dynamic and forceful Arab Culture of "The Great Arab Age" with its "miracle of Arabic science" does not exist now except in the memories of the Arabs. In other words, it was not the pattern that was transmitted to the Arabs of modern times by their predecessors of the Middle Ages. By the eleventh century the Arab World, then a part of the World of Islam, reached a state of decadence. Turks from Central Asia came into power and dominated most of the Arab World. A political break-up took place and the Arab World lost the unity that had given it power in the past. Sectarian revolutionary movements had made great headway and the unity of Islam was disrupted. Islam, which had been an irresistible force of the Arabs, revealing in the Great Arab Age their exceptional capacities and energies, became fossilized in a rigid structure of orthodoxy. Exerting one's intelligence and deliberate interpretation was not tolerated. Reactionary orthodox theologians waged war against science in an attempt to suppress it. Finally, succeeding in their struggle, the theologians monopolized the control of education; and consequently the sole type of education accessible in the Arab and Islamic lands was not only based upon, but consisted almost exclusively of religious instruction.

Economic changes contributed in creating the above situation. During the period under consideration, the Arab Middle East was transformed from a commercial monetary economy to one which, despite an extensive and important foreign and transit trade, was internally a feudal economy based on agriculture. At the end of the fifteenth century, the economy of the area received a severe blow as a result of the discovery of the Cape Passage between Europe and India, and the

subsequent bypassing of the Arab routes.[4]

Arab culture further deteriorated almost to the point of stagnation after the sixteenth century, when most of the Arab World fell under the domination of the Ottoman Turks of Asia Minor. The Ottoman genius, purely military and political, could not import to the Arabs any spiritual quality which would fertilize their culture. Nor were the Ottomans themselves fertilized by the treasures of Arab heritage or by the European Renaissance that had blossomed forth. Consequently sterility and rigidity became second nature to the Arab culture throughout the period of Ottoman rule, and the Arab World was destined to live three centuries further in the Middle Ages, while Europe travelled a long way in modern life.[5]

CULTURE AND EDUCATION IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By the close of the eighteenth century, the West had renewed itself through the Renaissance and Reformation. It had largely freed itself from feudal bonds and reshaped its political structure into centralized national states (mainly in the West). It had undertaken the great project of exploration, and through the discovery of new Eastern trade routes and new continents across the Atlantic Ocean, it had driven itself from the periphery to the centre of the world. It had made scientific and technical advances that were soon felt in the crafts of war and peace. In addition, education underwent drastic changes in its adminstration, content and direction. It was moving from religious and sectarian hands to secular and state authorities, from linguistic and religious curricula to scientific, practical and functional studies, and from preparing oneself for the other world to preparing oneself for a useful life.

In brief, within three centuries - extending from the 15th to the 18th - the West travelled a very long way from its medieval life, while the Arab World and the Ottoman Empire remained stagnant, and even in slumber.

Though the Ottoman Empire had been in contact with Western nations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, no attempt had been made on its side to bring about an intellectual movement or development of scientific thought in the Ottoman territory. "On the contrary, the critical spirit of modern times, that is of the Renaissance, retreated before the dogmatic spirit which then reigned supreme in the lands of Islam."[6]

Under the Ottoman dominion, the Arab World (with the exception of Maghreb and the inner part of the Arab Peninsula that remained

independent most of the time) was divided - in the eighteenth century, as it had already been, into a number of regencies, "vilayets", that approximated to fourteen. The salient features of Turkish administration over the Arab Countries were despotism, conservatism and anarchy. Throughout the vast extent of the area under consideration, the Arabs were generally deprived of any active share in the government of their countries. They were considered as mere "subjects" inferior in class to the Turks and foreign military elements. Their business, from the point of view of the sovereign state, was to till the land and practise a craft, to pay taxes and to supply the needs of the privileged ruling class. Their station in life and their economic position were regulated largely by the accident of birth.

Providing for public education had never been a part of the duty or function of the State in the Middle East of the eighteenth century. Instead, it fell within the realm of the Religious Institution. In the Ottoman Empire a sharp line of demarcation existed between the State and the religious institution. Each had its own functions and rarely overstepped them. The State was concerned with military, administrative and economic affairs; the Religious Institution with doctrine, law, education, intellectual life and social relations.[7]

The despotic anarchy of the Turkish adminstration, combined with the tax-farm or feudal system, brought about poor conditions in agriculture and agricultural communities - the most important social units, next to the family, in almost all Arab countries. Methods, implements and organization of agriculture remained primitive and the peasants' life continued to be simple. These factors, combined with the miserable economic and social status of the Arab peasants, were both a cause and effect of the high degree of illiteracy in Arab villages in that period. Formal education, in Kuttabs and mosques, did not exist except for religious purposes. At any rate, it was through the life in the village that a child could acquire his skills and knowledge in farming. There was no need, from a technical point of view, to receive formal agricultural education.

As for commerce, the tempo of transit trade through the Arab Middle East in the eighteenth century continued to slow down due to political disturbances and the insecurity of travellers, in addition to the earlier transference of international trade to the Cape route. This contributed to the cultural isolation of the Arab Worlds from the progressive West, as well as depriving it of the large revenues which, before the Age of Exploration, had been a major source of funds for the financing of "public" buildings, among which were the mosques - the centres of formal education.

In its form, techniques, and practices, marketing, transportation

and the interchange of local products, internal commerce continued to be primitive. Arabs in the mercantile communities seemed to acquire the simple skills of trading through apprenticeship. Edward W. Lane, who spent seven years in Egypt in the early nineteenth century, reported that children were sent by their parents to the public weigher (Qabbani) in the market place to learn arithmetic. They were probably taught something of weights, measure, currency, and the techniques of commercial dealings.

In the eighteenth century, industry in the Arab World shared in the general decline. Compared with its medieval or with those of contemporary Europe, the industrial products of the Arab countries were primitive and coarse.

Arab artisans of the eighteenth century were organized into craft corporations or guilds. These corporations discouraged initiative and creativeness, and thereby tended to stereotype the process of industry and to imprison the workmen into a narrow rut.

It was through these craft corporations that the young obtained their technical education. Every boy who wanted to learn a trade joined a workshop as an apprentice, and attached himself to a master who taught him the mystery of the craft and the traditions of the corporation. When the apprentice reached the age of maturity and acquired proficiency in his master's occupation, the corporation in a ceremonial festival recognized him as a member. In some instances the new member was given a diploma (Ijazah) by the head of the corporation.[8]

Here again, formal education in a school had no direct function in the preparation of youth for a craft. No public school of a technical nature, in the sense that we know, seemed to be mentioned in the literature on education in the Arab World in the eighteenth century.[9]

In fact, formal public education, represented in the Kuttabs scattered in the villages and madrasahs or college-mosques in the principal towns and cities,[10] was theoretical. Studies were relegated to a fixed sum of religious and linguistic knowledge, the acqusition of which was merely a mechanical process of amassing, summarizing or commenting on the subject matter, without any endeavour to reach out beyond it.[11]

Degenerating to this level, educational institutions in the Arab World in the eighteenth century - the Kuttabs and college-mosques - were no longer effective enough to influence or to direct the development of Arab society. "Based on inert ideas, rote memory and reliance upon authority to the exclusion of any will to create independ-

ent ideas and to plan productive actions,"[12] they sank to the level of merely holding society together by the inculcation of tradition. They, further, ceased to set before themselves even the hope of moulding the society in the direction of its ideals of early Islam.[13]

However, the Kuttab and college-mosque education was not but a function of the static cultural pattern that dominated the Arab World in the eighteenth century. As long as this pattern existed unchallenged by internal and/or external new influences, the Kuttabs and college-mosques continued to coast along safely without being undermined or compelled to change their course. This did not continue for long as we shall see in the following pages.

WESTERN IMPACT ON ARAB EDUCATION IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

As already pointed out, the West, by the eighteenth century, had progressed by leaps and bounds in many aspects of life and the cultural tide began to move steadily from West to East.

Despite the ramifications of the methods of the Western penetration and the subtlety of some Western influences, four important bridgeheads, through which these influences and penetrations infiltrated into the Arab World can be identified. One was Egypt and the Nile Valley (thus leading to the Sudan); the second was Syria (then including the Lebanon and Palestine); the third was the Arab Gulf and Iraq; and the fourth was Algeria and its neighbouring countries in North Africa.

At any rate, the Western cultural influences did not carry in many areas of the Arab World friendly features or reciprocal interests. Nor did the West for imperial considerations, give the Arab society an honest opportunity to transform drastically its way of life and develop itself into real new directions. Rather it contributed, directly and indirectly, to the persistence of many elements of the old cultural pattern handed down from the 18th century until the present.

The Western impact on the Arab World and the subsequent changes in Arab life during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in two major trends in education. One was the perpetuation of the indigenous education of the Kuttabs and college-mosques with some changes in its organization and content. The other was the introduction of a new separate educational system patterned after Western models.

The old indigenous educational institutions (the Kuttabs and college-mosques) did not easily lend themselves to change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Besides being very highly esteemed by the common

man, conservatism was powerfully entrenched in them. Also, colonial interests played an important role in keeping them aloof from change.

This can be clearly traced in Egypt and Syria, both of which fell under British and French control respectively in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the "cardinal principles" of direct British control in Egypt (1882-1922) and Iraq (1914-1958) was to encourage Kuttab education, which was to cater for the majority of children.[14] French colonial policy in Syria and Lebanon followed similar lines and further prohibited for a long time any reform in the Kuttab system and closed the institutions that attempted to introduce modern subjects.[15]

Yet, it should be noted that in many respects the Kuttabs in most parts of the Arab World did not remain ossified throughout the period of cultural change. Efforts were directed at different dates to reorganize them on more modern lines and bring them closer to the so-called modem"primary" education. This can be seen from a study of the history of education in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf region, in particular, during the first half of the twentieth century.

As for college-mosques (the complementary of the Kuttab in indigenous education) they were kept aloof from change until recently when they began to respond to reformation and reorganized themselves on progressive lines. However, instead of developing into secular institutions with broader functions, without losing their ethical and religious values, as had occurred in the West, the "old" higher institutions in the Arab World remained mainly academic and religious - thus clinging, by and large, to their traditional functions that go back to the late Middle Ages.

Al-Azhar in Egypt, which has held the highest reputation and prestige among all college-mosques, was the first to start reform along the above lines. Between 1866 and 1946 a series of laws was promulgated organizing that institution into three higher faculties (of Arabic, theology and Muslim law), preceded by a religious secondary and a religious primary stage. Al-Zeitounah in Tunisia and al-Qurawiyyin in Maghreb (Morroco) also followed similar lines later, while other college-mosques in the Arab World (e.g. Iraq, Syria and the Arab Gulf region) lost their traditional educational functions and became mere places for prayer.

By taking this traditional, narrow, and independent course, al-Azhar and its sister institutions in the Arab World, did not contribute in moving Arab society into new directions and horizons, particularly in science and technology. On the contrary, they were criticized for being instruments of cultural lag.

The Introduction of "Modern" Educational Patterns in the Arab World in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

The evolution of the "old" indigenous institutions into new educational patterns, as narrated above, tells but one part of the story of educational progress in the Arab World in modern times. Most of the modern educational institutions, particularly the technological, that now exist in the area, are not related to the old patterns that were handed down from the late Middle Ages. On the contrary, they - or at least their conceptual design - came from outside the indigenous cultural pattern, in the wake of the Western impact and the process of modernism and acculturation that had been taking place in the Arab World since the nineteenth century and even earlier.

Patterns of "Modern" Education in the Arab World

1. Syria and the Lebanon

The French Expedition (1798-1801) marked a new era in the history of Egypt and Syria. It brought Egypt, like Syria, face to face with a representative of a progressive Western culture which differed from that of Egyptians or Syrians, not only on the military plane, but also in the economic, intellectual, and social spheres.[16] Thus, the Egyptian and Syrian culture was subjected to a severe test. The enlightened Egyptians and Syrians were provided with an opportunity to compare their culture with modern scientific Western culture. They came to a conclusion that their medieval outlook and practices were no longer adequate for life in the new world. This is well expressed in their view that Egypt and Syria should "modernize" itself by taking from the West the secrets of its superiority in the sciences and arts.[17]

An attempt to set Egypt, and later Syria actually on the road to becoming a modern state was soon started when Mohammed Ali, an ambitious Albanian officer in the Turkish Army, succeeded, after the expulsion of the French, in manoeuvering his way to power, and was nominated as Pasha (ruler) of Egypt (1805-1848). However, "modernization" to the new ruler, mainly meant the creation of a strong army based on Western models, using the new science to equip it.

By these achievements Egypt took precedence over all other Arab countries in setting itself on the road to becoming a "modern" state and in establishing a "modern" educational system that stood side by side with the "old" which gradually receded to a secondary position.

When Mohammed Ali succeeded in building a powerful empire in the Middle East (1815-39), Egypt served as a base from which "modern" ideas and practices were introduced in the neighbouring Arab

countries included in the Empire (Syria, Sudan and parts of the Arab Peninsula).[18] This did not continue for long, however, The imperialist European powers co-operated with the Ottoman Sultan, and obliged Mohammed Ali, through force, to withdraw from Syria and the Arab Peninsula.

Save for the decade of precarious annexation to Egypt in the 1830's the Province of Syria (then including the Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan) remained an integral part of the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. During that period attempts by several Ottoman Sultans were made to reorganize the Empire on Western lines. Impressed by the military side of Western culture, they thought - as Mohammed Ali did in Egypt - that a balance of power could be achieved only through military and administrative organization on the European model. The organization of a modern army necessitated educational reforms in the Empire. Secular schools at the higher, secondary and primary levels (like those established in Egypt) were opened.[19]

The Syrian Province had a share in this modern education. According to statistics issued by the Turkish Government in 1915, there existed in Syria 446 primary schools in the vilayets of Damascus, Aleppo and Beirut. At the secondary level there were 5 schools. In every capital of the Syrian "vilayets" there was a normal school and a trade school. The latter was looked upon as inferior due to its concern with manual work. In addition, there were the Agricultural School of Salamiyah, the Higher School of Medicine at Damascus, and the Higher School of Law at Beirut.[20]

Besides being mal-distributed and limited in number, the "modern schools", inaugurated in Syria by the Turkish authorities, adopted the Turkish language as a medium of instruction and attracted mainly the sons of the Arab notables. Also, the new schools did not have their origin in local initiative. Nor did they arise as a result of a widely-felt need for reform. Consequently, they were relatively ineffective in causing any appreciable change in Arab life. However, they served as a nucleus for Arab public school systems in the political units that later developed in that region under the Mandatory System (the Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan).[21]

Foreign schools on the Western model were also established in Syria. European missionary (primarily French) activities in Syria went back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that missionary educational work of an advanced sort began to be given. Apart from French, American and British schools there were a few Greek, Swiss and Danish schools.

After World War One, the French Mandatory Government encouraged French missionary activities to a large extent, and gave subsidies to a large number of orders. By the end of the French mandate 1944/45, French schools in Syria and Lebanon constituted 74 per cent and 83 per cent of the total foreign schools; they enrolled 82 per cent and 84 per cent respectively of the total foreign school enrolment. Foreign schools, particularly the French and American, had also influenced the organization and content of native private schools, which were another major characteristic of education in the two countries (Syria and Lebanon).

With the declaration of the independence of Syria in 1946, and Lebanon in the same year, and the establishment of a new Syrian and Lebanon Government, a national policy in education free from French influences and calculated primarily to develop Syrian/Lebanon-Arab type of education was pursued. In Syria, an educational Act, No. 121, 1944, was passed which reorganized and unified the educational system for the whole country.[22]

2. Saudi Arabia

After the First World War, the Saudi State - originally established in Nejd - was extended to include Hejaz and Asir, thus becoming the largest political power in the Arab Peninsula. However, the country consisted mostly of desert areas where nomadic tribes formed a substantial proportion of the population. Poverty, conservatism and despotism were the prominent features. It was not until the Second World War that rich oil wells were discovered in Saudi Arabia, thus providing a new source of wealth and bringing prospects of progress.

Alongside the indigenous schools (Kuttabs and religious secondary and higher institutes) a modern education developed in Saudi Arabia during the first half of the twentieth century. The Saudi Government assumed responsibility for education in 1926 when a Directorate of Education was established. This was raised in 1953 to the status of a Ministry. In 1939 the system of public education was defined by Higher Order No. 14/1/1358. The Order made schooling free at all levels of education (then including elementary and secondary education). Until 1954 elementary education in Saudi Arabia was divided into two types, rural and primary. After that date it was unified.

Due to social, economic, political and geographic factors the progress of education in Saudi Arabia during the first half of the twentieth century, had been very slow at all levels. In 1952 the number of primary schools did not exceed 301 (with an enrolment of 39,920) while secondary schools were 10 (with an enrolment of 6,315) and the

vocational schools were only 1 (comprising 60 pupils).[23]

3. States of the Arab Gulf

Moving south of Iraq to the Arab Sheikdoms or Principalities that lie strung along the eastern coast of the Arab Peninsula (States of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Arab Emirates and Oman), one comes to the flagrant contradiction of early Western penetration and retardation of the area in entering the stream of modernism. As early as the nineteenth century Great Britain imposed its control over the area. Being concerned only with the protection of its own interests, it left the people to their tribal life and primitive administration. It was not until the twentieth century, and particularly after World War II, that is after the production of oil on a large-scale basis, that some of these principalities found their way into the modern world, and began to witness some drastic changes.

The introduction of new types of education other than the indigenous type (the Kuttabs and mosques) was a concomitant of modernization in the area. In Kuwait, for example, a Government of Education was established in 1936 and the first primary school in the typical modern sense started. In 1937 some secondary classes were initiated. However, secondary education in its organized form did not begin before 1942.[24] In Bahrain, it was not until 1926 that the administration of education was taken over by the Government (thus an Education Department was established). Technical education in Bahrain started in 1936 with carpentry and simple engineering classes, and secondary education began in 1947. The neighbouring Sheikhdoms followed the lead of Kuwait and Bahrain.[25]

CONCLUSION

The above historical survey on culture and education in the Arab World up to the middle of this century justifies us in putting forward the following conclusions:

1. The old indigenous educational institutions in the Arab World handed down from the late Middle Ages continued throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, to be mainly religious and linguistic in character. It was not before 1961 that Al-Azhar, the most famous of all the old institutions in the Arab World, began to be reformed drastically. It is hoped that the 1961 Al-Azhar reform will be an example to be followed by similar institutions in the Arab World.

2. The Arab non-scientific, non technological culture inherited from the late Middle Ages has been subject, either willingly or

forcibly, since the end of the eighteenth century to strong Western influences, varying in depth, scope and duration from one part of the Arab World to another. Consequently, Arab society underwent some changes that were not equally strong or rapid; nor were they at the same level in every Arab country.

However, the conditions and the nature of Western impact did not produce fundamental and radical changes in most parts of the Arab society. The influences were in many cases superimposed. The Western impact was closely connected with foreign military invasion, economic exploitation and political domination. The Arabs were prevented from adopting the positive contributions of Western culture, particularly in science and technology. All these halted the progress of the process of genuine modernization and encouraged the persistence of many elements of the old way of life in the Arab world.

3. New educational patterns, modelled on European educational systems came in the wake of Western impact. They were introduced in the Arab World either by Arabic Governments or by European agencies or authorities. In most of the Arab countries complete systems of modern education, including primary, secondary and higher schools were developed at different dates.

However, the modern educational systems in Arab countries did not rise above the level of their Arab cultural context and the forces determining Arab life in the period. In many parts of the Arab World, they were used for quite a long period as a means, in the hands of foreign powers, of exerting their influences and achieving the aims of their imperial policies. Besides being limited in number, scope, and function (mainly to provide a supply of government officials), modern educational systems were an imitation of aristocratic types of Western education, and furthermore directed in some cases at least, to assimilating the native elements to foreign cultures through the medium of foreign languages instead of regenerating Arab culture. In all parts of the Arab World, vocational, technological and scientific education remained scanty and neglected. Even after entrusting the administration of education to national elements in many Arab countries, most of the above trends continued to predominate. Thus instead of leading social reconstruction and bringing about genuine progress, new educational patterns fell short of realizing social and economic progress. The major problem which the Arab states have had to face since the middle of this century is how to bring about changes in the new educational patterns in terms of quality and quantity, so as to make them more capable of achieving social, economic, and technological changes.

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